2-27-1991

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Pro-Jo 2-27-91

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THOSE city-haters are at it again. Most recently it was Don Shoemaker, columnist at The Miami Herald, writing in these pages about the loss of population from some of our major cities, using figures recently released by the Census Bureau.

Citing the 103,000 population loss of Philadelphia, the 12 percent decline of Cleveland, and culminating with a quote from another famous city hater, Thomas Jefferson, Shoemaker gave a confused rationale for the decline of some of our cities.

It is too bad that he did not use a more complete listing of our largest cities and what has happened to them over the past 10 years rather than using data only from 16 states. If he had, he would have been able to paint a more optimistic picture of these urban centers.

The Census Bureau normally provides a list of the cities in the nation having more than 100,000 population, and it has just issued this listing of these 195 major urban centers. Taken as a whole, our largest cities are more than holding their own.

While Shoemaker chooses to concentrate on a Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, Newark, Cleveland and Chicago (all of which lost population) he chooses to omit Orlando, Charlotte, San Diego, Sacramento and Las Vegas, all of which had a greater than 25 percent population increase in the past 10 years.

There are now eight cities of more than one million compared, with the six in 1980. Two-thirds of the top 25 cities in the nation have gained population. And of those 195 cities having a population of more than 100,000 — an increase in their numbers of 29 over the past decade — 72 percent of them experienced a gain in population.

So how could he say "the good ol' country boy ... is avoiding the city."

A more accurate statement would be that those states and regions that have stabilized, or are growing slowly in population, contain those cities that lost population. For example, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Louisiana and Michigan increased their populations by less than one percent, and 19 (more than one-third) of the 55 population losing cities were located in these five states.

On the other hand, those states which increased in population generally have those cities which gained in population. For example, the five cities in Arizona of more than 100,000 population all increased, ranging from 23 to 89 percent. Forty-three of 44 cities in California gained by up to 84 percent. (Berkeley lost 604 people.) And the gain of the 18 of 19 cities in Texas ran as high as 80 percent, while only oil-patch Beaumont experienced a loss of three percent.

The cities that lost population tended to be the older industrialized cities of both the North and the South, reflecting a shift from an urban manufacturing base to a service economy that can be carried out anywhere. But even here, the answers are not that simple: Of the cities of more than 100,000 in southern New England (there are none in the three northern states) all gained in population except Bridgeport. Lowell's 12 percent increase was largely a result of a rising immigrant population, as was Providence's 2.5 percent.

The increasing role of state government, and the resultant one percent gain in state employment, a legacy from the Reagan years that shifted responsibility from the federal to the state levels, help explain the population increase that took place in two-thirds of the state capitals, many of which are in the large city category.

Increased college enrollments also boosted city population size. (College students are considered residents of the community in which they are housed on the day of the census.) And capitals such as Madison, Wisconsin and Columbus, Ohio each gained 12 percent. The more than 10,000 college students housed in Providence comprise a significant portion of the 160,728 total population of Rhode Island's capital city.

American cities have their problems, and people still continue to leave for greener spaces outside; but it would be a mistake to chalk them off as some type of has-been. As Don Shoemaker indicates, they have been with us for more than 6,000 years: There is little reason to doubt that they won't be around for another similar period of time.

Chester E. Smolski is director of Urban Studies at Rhode Island College.